

The Swallowtail Butterfly *Papilio machaon britannicus* Seitz in Northamptonshire

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A perfect specimen (♀) of the Swallowtail was caught on 1st June 1974 in a cottage garden in Polebrook on the perimeter of the Ashton Wold Nature Reserve—the 46th species of British butterfly to be captured in the area between 1920-1974. It is, of course, possible that this specimen was a genuine wanderer from Norfolk (the author also saw one on wing at Ashton in 1960) but it is more likely that it was accidentally introduced in the pupal stage with thatching reed from Hickling Broad. The roof of the cottage in the garden in which the butterfly was caught had been patched as recently as March 1974.

During the past 50 years considerable fluctuation has been noted in the numbers of butterfly species at Ashton (Rothschild, 1947) but the present decade is certainly the most impoverished with regard to the rarities for which the reserve is justly famous. In the following tables 16 species have been selected and a few notes on their status over the last hundred years have been added. During this time very little change has occurred in the wood. There has been no felling. Several small hawthorn scrub areas and protective ash plantations were added round the perimeter and some clearings near the centre have become overgrown and obliterated. Various fields adjoining Ashton Wold were first ploughed up during the Second World War, and cereal crops substituted for pasture land. This practice has continued. Improved drainage on adjoining land has contributed to less water accumulating in the 500 acres of woodland and surrounding fields, and the Reserve has, generally, become drier. Cowslips, although still plentiful, have considerably decreased in number and the primrose correspondingly increased. Scabious has virtually disappeared from the Reserve while honeysuckle has greatly increased. Violets are still extremely plentiful, but they have been adversely affected by the spread of enchanters nightshade in some of the best fritillary areas. In the hawthorn scrub many species of grasses appear to have been swamped by the coarser varieties. This change coincided with the temporary and dramatic reduction in the rabbit population between 1956 and 1972 (Rothschild & Marsh, 1956) and it will be interesting to see if any further changes will coincide with their return in force at the present time.

References

- Morris, F. O. (1908). *A History of British Butterflies*, 10th Edn. London: George Routledge & Sons. 234 pp.
- Rothschild, M. (1947). A note on *Ceratophyllus rusticus* Wagner (1903) (Siphonaptera) at Ashton Wold. *Entomologist*, **80**: 253-255.
- Rothschild, M. and Marsh, H. (1956). Increase of hares (*Lepus europaeus* Pallas) at Ashton Wold, with a note on the reduction in numbers of the brown rat (*Rattus norvegicus* Berkenhout). *Proc. zool. Soc. Lond.*, **127**: Pt. 3: 441-5.

Table 1. Status of some butterflies at Ashton Wold

Selected species	Recorded by F. O. Morris (10th edn. 1908)	Intensively collected 1910-1920	Well collected 1940-1950	General observations (No collecting) 1964-1974
Black Veined White <i>Aporia crataegi</i> (L.)	recorded by T. L. Powys	absent	absent	absent
Wood White <i>Leptidea sinapis</i> (L.)	"occurs"	absent	present; rare	absent
Marbled White <i>Melanargia galathea serena</i> (Verity)	"in plenty"	very common	present	absent
Speckled Wood <i>Pararge aegeria tircis</i> Butler	common in all parts	common	common	common
White Admiral <i>Ladoga camilla</i> (L.)	in the area but Ashton not mentioned	absent	common	absent
Large Tortoiseshell <i>Nymphalis polychloros</i> (L.)	"occurs"	absent	one caught 1945	absent
Comma <i>Polygonia c-album</i> (L.)	"occurs"	absent	very common (first caught 1923)	rare
Silverwashed Fritillary <i>Argynnis paphia</i> (L.)	"plentiful"	common	common	rare

Table 2. Status of some butterflies at Ashton Wold

Selected species	Recorded by F. O. Morris (10th edn. 1908)	Intensively collected 1910-1920	Well collected 1940-1950	General observations (No collecting) 1964-1974
Marsh Fritillary <i>Euphydryas aurinia</i> (Rott.)	Not recorded; nearest record Monks Wood	one caught 1920	absent	absent
Duke of Burgundy Fritillary <i>Hamearis lucina</i> (L.)	"occurs"	common	common	absent
Chequered Skipper <i>Carterocephalus palaemon</i> (Pallas)	"abundant"	common	common	absent*
Black Hairstreak <i>Strymonidia pruni</i> (L.)	"in plenty"	common	common	rare
White Hairstreak <i>Strymonidia w-album</i> (Knoch)	"obtained"	common	common	rare
Holly Blue <i>Celastrina agiolus britanna</i> (Verity)	not recorded for the county	present	present	present
Large Blue <i>Maculinea arion</i> (L.).	one recorded (11 specimens taken at Polebrook 12/20 July 1852)	absent	absent	absent

* Now possibly extinct in England. This is inexplicable at Ashton where both the foodplant and the bugle on which the imago feeds are doing well, and the appropriate clearings maintained.